

MEMOIR ON PAUPERISM

(1835)

FIRST PART

On the Progressive Development of *Pauperism* in the Modern Era and the Methods Used to Combat It

When one surveys the diverse countries of Europe, one is struck by a most extraordinary and apparently inexplicable sight.¹

The countries that appear the poorest are those which, in reality, contain the fewest indigents, while among the peoples whose opulence you admire, one part of the population is obliged to rely upon the gifts of the other in order to live.

Travel through England's countryside, and you will believe yourself transported into the Eden of modern civilization. With roads magnificently maintained, clean and new houses, well-fed herds wandering in rich meadows, strong and healthy farmers, wealth more dazzling than in any country in the world, more ornate and exquisite basic comforts, there is everywhere the feeling of order, of well-being, and of leisure; a feeling of universal prosperity that seems to exude from the atmosphere itself and that

thrills the heart with every step. This is how England appears at the traveler's first glance.

Now go more deeply into the interior of the villages,² examine the parish registers, and you will discover with an indescribable shock that one-sixth of the inhabitants of this flourishing kingdom live at the expense of public charity.

If you turn your gaze to Spain, and above all to Portugal, an entirely different sight strikes your eyes. Everywhere in your path, you will encounter a poorly fed, ill clothed, ignorant and coarse populace, living in miserable homes in the midst of half-uncultivated countryside. Nevertheless, the number of indigents is insignificant in Portugal. M. de Villeneuve estimates that one pauper is found for every twenty-five inhabitants of this kingdom.³ The celebrated geographer Balbi had previously given the figure of one indigent for every ninety-eight inhabitants.⁴

Rather than comparing two foreign countries to each other, contrast diverse parts of the same empire, and you will arrive at a similar result: you will see proportionate growth of, on the one hand, the number of those living in comfort, and on the other hand, the number of those who fall back upon public donations in order to live.

According to the calculations of a conscientious writer^a whose other theories I am, in fact, far from approving, the average number of indigents in France is one pauper per twenty inhabitants. But we can see immense differences among different parts of the kingdom. The department of the Nord, which is certainly the richest, the most populous, and the most advanced in everything, counts close to a sixth of its population for whom the assistance of charity is necessary. In the Creuse, the poorest and the least industrialized of our departments, we only meet one indigent for every fifty-eight inhabitants. By these statistics, the Manche is shown as having one pauper for every twenty-six inhabitants.⁵

a. M. de Villeneuve.

I think it is not impossible to give a reasonable explanation for this phenomenon. The effect to which I have just called attention comes from many general causes that would be too time-consuming to detail here, but they can at least be indicated.

Here, in order to make myself better understood, I feel the need to return for a moment to the beginning of human societies. I will then rapidly go down the river of humanity to today.

Behold men gathering for the first time. They come out of the forest, they are still wild,⁶ they join forces not to enjoy life, but to find the means of surviving. Shelter against the intemperance of the seasons, sufficient food—such is the object of their efforts. Their minds⁷ do not go beyond these goods, and if they obtain them without trouble, they judge themselves satisfied with their fate and doze in idle comfort. I have lived in the midst of barbarous tribes in North America; I have lamented their destiny, but they do not find it at all cruel. Sunk in the middle of the smoke of his hut, covered in coarse clothes which are the work of his hands or the fruit of his hunting, the Indian looks with pity at our arts and considers the advances of our civilization a tiresome and shameful subjugation; he envies us only our weapons.

Having reached this first age of societies, men thus still have very few desires and hardly feel any needs other than those felt by animals; through social organization, they have only discovered the means of satisfying them with less effort. Until they become acquainted with agriculture, they live by hunting; from the moment they learn the art of making the earth bring forth harvest, they become farmers. So each works the field that has fallen to him to bring forth whatever could nourish him and his children. Land ownership is created, and with that, the most active element of progress is born.

From the moment men possess land, they settle down. In cultivating the earth, they find abundant resources against hunger. Assured of survival, they begin to glimpse that human existence offers other sources of pleasures beyond the satisfaction of life's first and most urgent needs.

As long as men had been wanderers and hunters, permanent inequality had not been able to insert itself permanently among them. There was no outward sign at all that could permanently establish the superiority of one man and, above all, of one family over another family or another man; and had this outward sign existed, it would not have been transferrable to his children. But as soon as land ownership was known and men had converted vast forests into arable fields and grassy meadows, from then on, we saw individuals gathering into their hands much more land than was necessary to feed themselves and thus perpetuating ownership in their descendants' hands. From then on, superfluity exists; with superfluity is born the taste for pleasures other than the satisfaction of the most basic physical needs.

It is at this stage of societies that the origin of almost all aristocracies must be found.

While some men already know the art of concentrating all the material and intellectual enjoyments of life with wealth and power in the hands of the few, the half-civilized crowd [*la foule à demi-sauvage*] still ignores the secret of spreading comfort and liberty to all. At this epoch of the history of the human species, men have already abandoned the crude and proud virtues that had been born in the forests; they have lost barbarism's advantages without acquiring those of civilization. Attached to the cultivation of the soil as if it were their only resource, they disregard the art of defending the fruits of their labors. Placed between the wild independence they are no longer able to desire and the civil and political liberty that they do not yet understand, they are given over to violence and deceit without any appeal, and they reveal themselves ready to submit to every tyranny, provided that they are left to live—or better yet, to vegetate—near their fields.

It is thus that landed property is accumulated immoderately and that government becomes concentrated in a few hands. It is thus that war, rather than imperiling the people's political condition as is the case nowadays, menaces the individual property of

each citizen. Inequality reaches its furthest limits in the world and one sees the spirit of conquest, which has been the father and mother of all aristocratic societies, spread.

The barbarians who invaded the Roman Empire at the end of the fourth century were savages [*sauvages*] who had glimpsed landed property's utility and had wanted to get its advantages for themselves. Most of the Roman provinces that they attacked were peopled by men who had long been dependent on farming and whose mores⁸ had been softened by the peaceful activities of field labor but for whom civilization had not yet made sufficient progress to make them capable of fighting against the primitive fierceness of their enemies. Victory placed not only the government but also the property of the third estate⁹ into the barbarians' hands. The farmer became a tenant farmer. Inequality passed into laws, and from having been a fact, it became a right. Feudal society was organized and the Middle Ages were born. If we pay attention to what has happened since the birth of societies, we will easily discover that equality is only found at the two ends of society. Savages are equal because they are all equally weak and ignorant. Very civilized men are able to all become equal because they all have similar means of attaining comfort and happiness at their disposal. Between these two extremes, the inequality of conditions is found: the wealth, enlightenment, and power of some and the poverty, ignorance, and weakness of all the others.

Able and wise writers have already worked to make the Middle Ages known; others—among whom we are able to include the secretary of the Academic Society of Cherbourg¹⁰—are still working on this. I thus leave this great task to men more capable of completing it than I; here, I only want to examine one corner of the immense picture that the feudal centuries unfold before our eyes.

In the twelfth century, that which has since been called the third estate did not yet exist. The population was divided into only two categories: on the one side, those who cultivated the

soil without possessing it, and on the other, those who possessed the soil without cultivating it.

As for the first group of the population, I imagine that their fate was in some respects less to be pitied than that of the common people nowadays. These people, who had more liberty, elevation, and morality than our colonies' slaves, nevertheless found themselves in an analogous situation. Their means of survival were almost always guaranteed; in this, the master's interest coincided with theirs. Limited in their desires as well as in their power, without distress about the present, tranquil about a future that was not in their control, they enjoyed that type of vegetative happiness whose charm is as difficult for the highly civilized man to understand as its existence is difficult for him to deny.

The other class presented the opposite picture. There is found the custom of hereditary leisure as well as assured superabundance. I am far from believing, however, that even in the midst of this privileged class, the search for life's pleasures pushed as far as is generally assumed. Luxury can easily exist in the midst of a nation that is still half-barbarous, but comfort cannot. Comfort presupposes a large class whose members are simultaneously employed in trying to make life sweeter and more comfortable. Now, in the period about which I am speaking, the number of those who were not exclusively preoccupied with the cares of survival was very small. This group's existence was brilliant and lavish, but not commodious. They ate with their fingers from plates of silver or engraved steel; their clothes were covered with ermine and gold, and undergarments were unknown; they lived in palaces whose walls were covered with dampness, and they sat on ornately sculpted wooden seats near immense hearths in which entire trees were consumed without any spread of warmth. I am convinced that there is not a provincial town today whose comfortable inhabitants do not have more true conveniences of life in their homes and who do not find it easier to satisfy the thousand needs to which civilization has given birth than did the proudest baron of the Middle Ages.

If we turn our gaze to the feudal centuries, we will thus discover that the great majority of the population lived almost without needs and that the remainder experienced only a few. The land was enough, as it were, for all. Comfort was found nowhere, survival everywhere.

It was necessary to establish this point of departure in order to make what I am going to say well understood.

As time goes on, the population that cultivates the soil conceives of new tastes. Satisfying the most basic needs is no longer enough. The peasant, without leaving his fields, wants to find himself better lodged, better clad; he glimpses the pleasures of comfort and wants to acquire them. On the other side, the class that lives off the land without cultivating the soil expands the sphere of its pleasures; its enjoyments are less lavish, but more complicated and varied. A thousand needs that were unknown to the medieval nobles spur on their descendants. A large number of men who live on and from the soil leave the fields and find a way to provide for their livelihoods by working to satisfy these new needs that arise. Agriculture, which was everyone's occupation, is now only that of the many. Next to those who live from the products of the earth, but do not work, arises a numerous class that lives by its own industry,¹¹ but not by working the land.

As each century slips from the Creator's hands, the human mind is developed, the circle of thought broadens, desires increase, and man's power grows. The poor and the rich, each in their sphere, develop ideas of new pleasures that their predecessors had overlooked. In order to satisfy these new needs, which could not be satisfied by the cultivation of the earth, a portion of the population leaves field work each year to devote themselves to industry.

If we carefully consider what has happened in Europe over the past several centuries, we are left convinced that as civilization has progressed, a vast displacement of population has taken place. Men left the plow for the shuttle and the hammer; from the

cottage, they went to the factory. In so proceeding, they obeyed the immutable laws governing the growth of organized societies. Thus, we can no more assign a term to this movement than we can impose limits upon human perfectibility. The limits of both are only known to God.

What has been and what is the consequence of this gradual and irresistible movement we have just described?

An immense quantity of new goods has been introduced into the world; the class that remained in agriculture has found at its disposal a host of pleasures that the preceding century had not known. The farmer's life has become easier and more comfortable; the great proprietor's life has become more varied and more ornamented. Comfort is found within reach of the many, but these happy outcomes have not been achieved without a necessary cost.

I said that in the Middle Ages comfort was nowhere, survival everywhere. This summarizes in advance what will follow. When almost all of the population lived by cultivating the soil, extreme poverty and coarse mores were found, but man's most pressing needs were met. It is very rare that the earth cannot at least supply that which appeases the call of hunger's cry to one who waters the earth with his sweat. The population was poor indeed,¹² but it survived. Today, the population is happier, but there is always a minority ready to die of want if it did not have recourse to public support.

Such a result is easy to understand. The farmer produces basic foodstuffs. Their sale might be more or less profitable, but it is more or less guaranteed; and if an accidental cause prevents the selling of agricultural products, these products at least furnish the means of life to those who have harvested them and allow them to wait for better times.

By contrast, the worker speculates on artificial and secondary needs that can be limited by a thousand causes and can be completely eliminated by great events.

Whatever might be the hardships of the times, or the high costs or cheapness of commodities, each man needs a certain amount of nourishment or he languishes and dies, and one may trust that he will always make extraordinary sacrifices in order to obtain them. But unhappy circumstances can lead people to deny themselves certain pleasures in which they had effortlessly indulged in other times. Yet it is the taste for and use of these pleasures upon which the worker counts in order to live. If they are lacking, he has no other resource. His own harvest is burned, his fields are made barren, and if by any chance such a situation continues, he sees only dreadful poverty and death.

I have only spoken of the case in which the population limits its needs. Many other causes can lead to the same effect: excessive production by citizens, foreign competition . . .¹³

The industrial class that so powerfully helps the well-being of others is thus much more exposed than they are to sudden and incurable evils. In the great fabric of human societies, I consider the industrial class as having received from God the special and dangerous mission of providing, by its own risks and dangers, the material happiness of all the others. Now, this natural and irreversible movement of civilization tends to increase continually the relative size of those who belong to this class. Each year, needs multiply and diversify, and with them grows the number of individuals who hope to create comfort by working to satisfy these new needs rather than staying employed in agriculture: this is a major subject of reflection for today's statesmen!

This is the principal cause to which we must attribute what happens within wealthy societies, where comfort and indigence encounter each other to a greater extent than elsewhere. The industrial class, which supplies pleasures of the greatest number, is itself exposed to miseries that would be almost unknown if this class did not exist.

However, still other causes contribute to the gradual development of pauperism.

Man is born with needs and he makes needs for himself. Those of his physical constitution are primary; secondary are those of habit and education. I have shown that at the origins of societies, men have hardly any but natural needs, seeking only to live; but as life's pleasures become more expansive, men acquired the habit of indulging in some of those pleasures, which end up becoming almost as necessary as life itself. I will cite the habit of using tobacco because tobacco is a luxury good that has spread all the way to the wilderness and has created among the natives [*sauvages*] an artificial pleasure that must be obtained at any price. Tobacco is almost as indispensable to the Indians as food; they are as inclined to appeal to their peers' charity when they lack one as when they lack the other. Thus, it is one cause of begging that was unknown to their forefathers.

What I have said about tobacco applies to a multitude of objects that one could not do without in civilized life. The more a society is wealthy, industrious, prosperous, the more the pleasures of the greatest number become varied and permanent, the more that they become, through habit and example, real needs. Civilized man is thus infinitely more exposed to the vicissitudes of fate than is savage¹⁴ man. That which never happens to the second, except from time to time and in certain circumstances, can always and under very ordinary circumstances happen to the first. Along with the circle of his pleasures, he has expanded the circle of his needs, and he more greatly exposes himself to the blows of Fortune. From this comes the fact that the poor of England seem almost rich to the poor of France, who seem rich to the indigents of Spain. What the Englishman lacks has never been possessed by the Frenchman. And it is like this as one continues down the social scale. Among very civilized peoples, the lack of a multitude of things causes poverty; in the savage state, impoverishment consists only in not finding something to eat.

Civilization's progress not only exposes men to many new miseries; it even brings society to relieve miseries of which, in a

half-civilized country, one does not even dream. In a country where the majority is poorly clad, poorly housed, poorly fed, who thinks of giving clean clothing, healthy food, and comfortable lodging to the poor? Among the English, where the greatest number, possessing all of these goods, sees not being able to enjoy them as a terrible misfortune, society believes it must come to the aid of those who are deprived of them, and it cures evils that it did not previously even perceive.

In England, the average of pleasures for which a man can hope in life is higher than in any other country in the world. This drastically facilitates the spread of pauperism in that kingdom.

If all of these reflections are correct, one will easily see that the more nations are wealthy, the more the number of those who appeal to public charity must multiply, because two very powerful causes tend toward this result: among these nations, the class most naturally exposed to need is increasing incessantly, and on the other side, needs themselves infinitely multiply and diversify; the opportunity of finding oneself exposed to some of them becomes more frequent each day.

We should not give ourselves over to dangerous illusions; let us look calmly and peacefully at the future of modern societies. Let us not become drunk by the spectacle of its greatness; let us not become discouraged by the sight of its miseries. As civilization's present movement continues, we will see the pleasures of the greatest number grow; society will become more perfected, wiser; existence will be more comfortable, sweeter, more embellished, longer. But at the same time, let us foresee that the number of those who will need to turn to the support of their fellow men in order to receive a tiny part of those goods will continually grow. This double movement can be slowed; particular circumstances among different peoples will precipitate or pause its course; but no one can stop it. Let us therefore hasten to look for the means of attenuating the inevitable evils which are already easy to foresee.

SECOND PART

There are two types of beneficence: one leads each individual to relieve, according to his means, all of the ills that are found within his reach. This type is as old as the world; it began with human miseries. Christianity made it a divine virtue and called it charity.

The other, less instinctive, more rational, less enthusiastic, and often more powerful, leads society itself to concern itself with the misfortunes of its members and to attend systematically to the relief of their distress. This was born out of Protestantism and is developed only in modern societies.

The first is a private virtue; it escapes social action. The second, by contrast, is produced and regularized by society. It is therefore with the second that we must especially be concerned.

At first sight, there is no idea that appears more beautiful and more grand than public charity.

Society reflects upon itself, daily probing its injuries and concerning itself with healing them; while assuring the rich of the enjoyment of their goods and protecting the poor from the excess of their misery, society also demands from some a portion of their superfluity in order to provide necessities for the others. This is certainly a grand spectacle in the presence of which the mind is elevated and the soul cannot fail to be touched.

How is it that experience comes to destroy a part of these beautiful illusions?

England is the only country in Europe that has systemized and broadly applied these theories of public charity. Under Henry VIII, during the religious revolution that changed the face of England, almost all of the charitable communities were suppressed, and because the goods of these communities passed into the hands of the nobles and were not at all divided among the hands of the people, it followed that the number of poor then existing stayed the same, while the means of providing for their needs were partly destroyed. The number of poor thus grew sig-

nificantly. Struck by the offensive sight of the people's miseries, Elizabeth, Henry the VIII's daughter, considered substituting an annual subsidy furnished by the local villages for the alms that the suppression of the convents had so greatly reduced.

A law promulgated in the forty-third year of that queen's reign^b provided that in each parish, inspectors of the poor would be named and that these inspectors would have the right to tax inhabitants in order to feed the disabled indigents and furnish the others with work. As time marched forward, England was increasingly led to adopt the principle of legal charity. Pauperism grew more rapidly in Great Britain than everywhere else. Some general causes and others unique to that country produced this sad result. In civilized life, the English were ahead of the other nations of Europe; all of the reflections I have previous offered are thus particularly applicable to them, but there are others that apply to them alone.

England's industrial class provides for the needs and the pleasures of not only the English people but also of a large part of humanity. Its well-being or its miseries depend not only on what happens in Great Britain but also in some sense on all that happens under the sun. When an inhabitant of the Indies reduces his expenses and cuts back his consumption, there is an English manufacturer who suffers. England is thus the country in the world in which the farmer is most strongly attracted to industrial work—but also finds himself the most exposed to the vicissitudes of fortune.

For a century, something has been happening among the English that could be considered extraordinary if one paid attention

b. See, first, Blackstone, book 1, chapter 4; second, the principal results of the inquiry made in 1833 into the state of the poor, contained in the book entitled *Extracts from the Information Received by His Majesty's Commissioners as to the Administration and Operation of the Poor-Laws*; third, *The Report of the Poor-Laws Commissioners*; fourth and finally, the law of 1834 that has been the result of all of these studies.

to the spectacle provided by the rest of the world. For a hundred years, landed property has been divided up in the known world; in England, it has been continually concentrating. Midsized plots of land have disappeared in vast holdings; large-scale farming has replaced small-scale farming. There could be some not uninteresting explanations of this to offer, but they would draw me away from my subject; the fact suffices and it is constant. The result of this is that, while the farmer is drawn by his own interest to quit the plough and enter into the factories, he is in some way pushed by the consolidation of landed property to do it despite himself. This is because, proportionately speaking, infinitely fewer workers are needed to cultivate a large estate than a small field. The earth fails him and industry calls him. This double movement pulls at him. Of the twenty-five million inhabitants peopling Great Britain, no more than nine million are involved with cultivating the soil; fourteen [million] or almost two-thirds follow the risky opportunities of commerce and industry.^c Pauperism thus necessarily grew faster in England than in countries whose civilization had been equal that of the English. Once having accepted the principle of legal charity, England was not able to depart from it. Thus, the English legislation about the poor was nothing but a long development, over two hundred years, of Elizabeth's laws. Almost two and a half centuries have passed since the principle of legal charity was fully accepted by our neighbors, and we can now judge the fatal consequences that have followed from the adoption of this principle. Let us examine them one by one.

With the poor person having an absolute right to society's assistance and finding in all places a public administration organized to furnish him with it, we quickly see the rebirth and spread across a Protestant country of those abuses for which

c. In France, the industrial class is still only one-quarter of the population.

the Reformation had rightly reproached some of the Catholic countries. Man, like all composite beings, has a natural passion for idleness. Yet there are two motives that impel him to work: the need to live and the desire to improve his living conditions. Experience has proven that most men can be sufficiently motivated to work by only the first of these motives, and that the second is powerful only among a small number. Now, a charitable organization, open indiscriminately to all of those who are in need, or a law that gives to all poor—whatever the origin of their poverty—a right to public assistance, weakens or destroys the first stimulant and leaves only the second intact. Whether English or Spanish, the peasant who does not feel the intense desire to improve the condition in which he was born and to leave that sphere (a weak desire that in most men collapses easily)—I say that the citizen of both these countries has no interest in working, or if he works, he has no interest in saving. He thus remains idle or thoughtlessly spends the precious fruits of his labors. In either of these countries, different causes bring the same result: it is the most generous, active, and industrious part of the nation that devotes its assistance to furnishing the means of life to those who do nothing or who make bad use of their work.

We are certainly far from the beautiful and seductive theory that I set out above. Is it possible to escape these disastrous consequences of a good principle? For myself, I confess that I consider them inevitable.

Here, one might interrupt me by saying: “You assume that assistance will be given to poverty, whatever its cause; you add that public assistance will take away the obligation to work among the poor; but this is to state as a fact something that remains to be proven. What prevents society from inquiring into the causes of need before giving assistance? Why wouldn’t work be imposed as a condition upon the able-bodied indigent who appealed to public sympathy?” I respond that the English laws have developed the idea of these palliatives, but they have failed, and this can easily be understood.

Nothing is as difficult as distinguishing the nuances that separate an undeserved unhappiness from misfortune that vice has produced. How many miseries are simultaneously the result of both of these two causes! What profound knowledge of the character of each man and of the circumstances in which he has lived is presupposed by judgment about such a point; what enlightenment, what certain discernment, what cold and inexorable reason! Where will be found the magistrate with the conscience, the time, the talent, the means of devoting himself to such an examination? Who will dare to let a poor man die of hunger because this death is his own fault? Who will hear his cries and argue about his vices? At the sight of the miseries of our fellow men, even personal interest is quieted. Would the interest of the public treasury be more powerful? And if these emotions, which are beautiful even when they are misplaced, will not reach the soul of the overseer of the poor,¹⁵ will not fear reach it instead? Holding in his hands the sorrows or the joys, the life or the death of a considerable portion of his fellow men—of the most disordered, turbulent, and coarse part—will he not shrink from the exercise of this terrible power? And if one of these intrepid men could be found, would others be found? That said, such functions cannot be exercised except in a small territory; thus, it is necessary to endow a great many citizens with this power. The English have been obliged to place overseers of the poor in every village.¹⁶ What invariably follows from this? Poverty is identified, but its causes remain unclear: poverty is an evident fact, but its causes can only be proven by reasoning that is always contestable. Since assistance inflicts only an indirect harm to society, while its refusal directly harms the poor and even the overseer himself, the overseer's decision will not be in doubt. The laws will have declared that blameless poverty alone will be given assistance, but in practice, assistance will be given to all poverty. As for this second point, I will make some similar arguments, equally drawn from experience.

We would like work to be the price of alms. But, first, are there always public works to be done? Are they equally spread throughout the entire country, in such a manner that we never see many works to be done and few people to do them in one district, and in another, many indigents to aid and few works to be done? Because this difficulty is found in every era, mustn't it become insurmountable when—as a result of civilization's progressive development, of population growth, of the effects of the poor laws themselves—the number of indigents reaches one-sixth of the total population, as in England, or one-fourth, as in other countries?

But even supposing that works to be done are always to be found, who will take the responsibility of ascertaining their urgency, of overseeing their execution, of setting their price? This man, the overseer, independently of his qualities as a great magistrate, will thus also need to have the talents, the energy, the special knowledge of a good industrial entrepreneur. He will find in the sense of duty that which personal interest itself would probably be powerless to create: the courage to force the most inactive and vicious part of the population to productive and sustained efforts. Would it be wise to flatter ourselves about this? Is it reasonable to believe it?Appealed to by the needs of the poor, the overseer will impose made-up work, or even—like that which is almost always done in England—will give wages without requiring work. The laws must be made for men and not with an eye to an ideal perfection that does not correspond to human nature or to patterns that are only rarely seen.

Every measure that establishes legal charity on a permanent basis and that gives it an administrative form thus creates an idle and lazy class, living at the expense of the industrial and working class. This, at least, is its inevitable consequence, if not its immediate result. It reproduces all of the vices of the monastic system, but without the lofty ideas of morality and of religion that often went along with it. Such a law is a poisoned seed, planted in the

bosom of legislation. As in America, circumstances can prevent the seed from developing rapidly, but they cannot destroy it, and if the present generation escapes its influence, it will devour the well-being of the generations to come.

If you closely study the condition of the populations in which similar legislation has long been in force, you will easily discover that the effects are not less unfortunate for morality than for public prosperity and that it depraves men even more than it impoverishes them.

In general, there is nothing that elevates and sustains the human mind [*esprit*] more than the idea of rights. In the idea of rights, we find something grand and virile that removes the suppliant nature from the request and places him who asks on the same level as him who bestows. But the right that the poor person has to obtain society's assistance is unique, in that rather than elevating the heart of the man who exercises it, it debases him. In countries in which legislation has never offered such a remedy, it is true that the poor person, in appealing to individual charity, recognizes his inferior state in relation to his fellow beings, but he recognizes it in secret and for a moment. From the moment the indigent is inscribed on the list of parish poor, he can certainly demand assistance, but what is the obtaining of this right, if not a formalized manifestation of the poverty, weakness, and misconduct of the one in whom that right is vested? Ordinary rights are conferred upon men because of some personal advantage acquired by them over their fellow beings. This right is bestowed because of a recognized inferiority. The first emphasizes and records that advantage; the second highlights this inferiority and legalizes it.

The greater and more secure these first types of rights are, the more they are honored; the more the other type is permanent and widespread, the more it degrades.

The poor person who demands alms in the name of the law is thereby in a still more humiliating position than the indigent

who asks his fellow beings for alms out of pity and in the name of the one who sees the poor and the rich with the same eye and who subjects them to equal laws.

But that is not all: individual alms establish precious ties between the rich man and the poor one. The act of generosity itself makes the giver interested in the one whose poverty he has undertaken to relieve. The second, supported by assistance that he had no right to demand and that he perhaps did not hope to obtain, feels himself drawn by gratitude. A moral link is established between these two classes that have so many interests and passions contributing to their separation, and, though they are divided by fortune, their will brings them together. Legal charity is not like this. Alms remain, but their morality is removed. The rich man, whom the law strips of a part of his surplus without consulting him, sees in the poor man only a greedy stranger, summoned by the legislator to share his goods. From his side, the poor man feels no gratitude for a benefit that could not be denied him and that would not in any case satisfy him, for public alms, which ensure life, do not make it any more happy or comfortable than individual almsgiving does. Legal charity thus does not prevent there being a class of poor and a class of rich in society, with one looking around with fear or hatred and the other thinking about their troubles with despair and envy. Far from tending to unite into a single people these two rival nations that are called the rich and the poor and that have existed since the beginning of the world, legal charity breaks the only line that could have been established between them. It arranges each under its banner, counts them, and bringing them face-to-face, readies them for combat.

I have said that the inevitable result of legal charity is to keep the greatest number of poor in idleness and to maintain their leisure at the expense of those who work.

If idleness in the midst of wealth, the hereditary idleness earned by works or services, the idleness surrounded with public

regard, accompanied by inner contentment [*le contentement d'esprit*], interested by the pleasures of the mind, moralized by the exercise of thought—if this idleness, I say, has been the mother of so many vices, what will come from a degraded idleness acquired from cowardice, earned by misconduct, that is enjoyed amid ignominy and that can only be endured to the extent that the soul of the one who suffers it becomes completely corrupted and degraded?

For what is there to hope for from a man whose position cannot be improved, because he has lost the respect of his fellows, which is the first condition of all progress; whose luck will not become worse, because having been reduced to the satisfaction on his most pressing needs, he is assured that they will always be satisfied? What action for conscience and human activity remains in a being so limited in every way, who lives without hope and without fear because he knows the future, as an animal does, because he ignores destiny's circumstances, and who is thus focused like the animal in the present and in the ignoble and fleeting pleasures that the present offers to a brutalized nature?

Read all the books written in England on pauperism. Study the investigations ordered by the British Parliament. Look at the discussions that took place in the House of Lords and in the Commons on this difficult question. One single cry will ring out to your ears: we deplore the degraded state into which the inferior classes of this great people have fallen! The number of illegitimate children has risen continuously; that of criminals has grown incessantly. The indigent population is increasing greatly; the spirit of foresight and of saving becomes more and more foreign to the poor. While enlightenment expands throughout the rest of the nation, mores become gentler, taste becomes more delicate, habits more polite—the poor remain immobile or regress; one could say that they fall back toward barbarism while in the midst of civilization's wonders, their ideas and inclinations bring them closer to savages.

Legal charity's effects on the poor man's liberty are as disastrous as its effects on his morality. This is easily demonstrable: from the moment villages are given a strict duty to assist indigents, it immediately and necessarily follows that villages owe assistance only to the poor domiciled in their territory. This is the only fair way of equalizing the public burden, which results from the law, and of making it proportionate to the means of those who must bear it. Since individual charity is almost unknown in a country in which public charity is organized, it can happen that he whose misfortunes or vices render him incapable of earning a living is sentenced, under pain of death, not to leave the place in which he was born. If he leaves, he is only going to enemy territory: individual interest within the villages, otherwise strong and much more active than the best-organized national police force, denounces his arrival, watches his every move, and, if he wants to take up residency somewhere new, refers him to the public authority, who brings back him to the place of departure. By their Poor Laws, the English have *immobilized* one-sixth of their population. They have tied them to land, just as the medieval peasants were. Villeinage *forced* the individual, *against his will*, to remain where he was born; legal charity *stops him from wanting* to move away. This is the only difference I see between the two systems. The English have gone further, and from the principle of public charity, they have drawn what I think are the most disastrous effects. The English villages are so preoccupied with the fear that an individual might fall into their charge and might obtain domicile in their midst that when a stranger whose appearance does not announce opulence settles momentarily among them or when an unexpected misfortune strikes him, the municipal authority hastens to demand a security deposit against future poverty, and if the foreigner cannot not furnish this deposit, he must leave.

Thus, legal charity has taken the freedom of movement not only from the poor of England but also from all those whom poverty menaces.

I would not know, I think, how better to complete this sad picture than by transcribing here the following passage that I find in my notes on England.

I traveled throughout Great Britain in 1833. Others were struck by the prosperity of the country: I reflected upon the hidden restlessness¹⁷ that manifestly exercised the minds of all its inhabitants. I thought that great miseries must have been hidden under this brilliant mantle that Europe admires. This idea led me to examine with special attention pauperism, this hideous and immense tumor attached to a healthy and vigorous body.

I was then staying in the house of a large landowner in the south of England; it was when the justices of the peace were meeting to pass judgments about the claims that the poor brought against the village, or the village against the poor. My host was a justice of the peace, and I regularly accompanied him to court. In my travel notes, I find this sketch of the first hearing I attended; it summarizes in a few words and brings into relief everything I have said until now. I transcribe with painstaking precision in order to give the simple stamp of truth to the scene.

"The first individual presenting himself before the justices of the peace is an old man. His face is fresh and rosy, he is wigged and wearing an excellent black outfit. He seems to be a man of independent means. He approaches the bench and, enraged, complains about the injustice of his commune's administrators. This man is a pauper,¹⁸ and his share of the public charity has just been unjustly diminished. The case is postponed in order for the village administrators to be heard.

"After this hearty and petulant old man appears a pregnant young woman whose clothing attests to recent poverty and whose faded features bear the imprint of her sufferings. She explains that her husband left several days ago for a sea voyage, and that because she has received neither news nor support from him since then, she is asking for public alms, but the overseer of the poor¹⁹ hesitates to give it to her. The father-in-law of this woman

is a well-off merchant. He lives in the same town in which the court holds its sessions, and it is hoped that he will want, in the absence of his son, to take responsibility for the maintenance of his daughter-in-law. The justices of the peace summon this man, but he refuses to fulfill the duties that nature imposes upon him but which the law does not demand from him. The magistrates insist; they attempt to inspire remorse or compassion in this man's selfish²⁰ soul. Their efforts fail, and the village is sentenced to pay the requested relief.

"After this poor, abandoned woman come five or six large and vigorous men. They are in the force of youth; their manner is firm and almost insulting. They complain about the administrators of their villages, who refuse to give them work, or in the place of work, assistance.

"The administrators reply that the village has no work to carry out at this moment; and as for free assistance, they say it is not required, because the plaintiffs could easily find employment with private individuals, if they wanted to.

"Lord X,^d with whom I had come, said to me: 'In a small setting, you have just seen one part of the numerous abuses that the Poor Laws produce. This old man, who came forward first, probably has enough to live on, but he thinks that he has the right to demand that he be supported in comfort, and he does not blush to ask for public charity, which has, in the eyes of the people, lost its painful and humiliating character. That young woman, who seems honest and unfortunate, would certainly have been taken care of by her father-in-law if the Poor Laws did not exist, but interest silences the cry of shame within him, and he unloads on the public a debt that he alone should pay. As for the young people who presented themselves last, I know them and they live in my village: they are very dangerous citizens, and in fact, bad subjects. They quickly spend in pubs the money they

d. Lord Radnor.

earn because they know that the state will come to their assistance; thus, they see that at the first difficulty, caused by their own fault, they appeal to us.'

"The audience continues. A young woman comes before the bench; her village's overseer of the poor follows her, and a child accompanies her. She approaches without the smallest sign of hesitation; modesty does not even make her lower her gaze. The overseer accuses her of having had the baby she carries in her arms through illicit sexual intercourse.

"She agrees to this without discomfort. As she is indigent, and as the illegitimate baby, if the father remains unknown, becomes with its mother the responsibility of the village, the overseer orders her to name the father. The court puts her under oath. She names a neighborhood peasant. This man, who is present in the audience, complacently admits the accuracy of the statement, and the justices of the peace sentence him to support the child. The father and the mother retire, without this incident stirring the least emotion in the assembly, which is accustomed to these types of spectacles.

"After this young woman, another presents herself. This one comes voluntarily; she approaches the magistrates with the same insolent carelessness that the first young woman had shown. She states that she is pregnant and names the father of unborn child; this man is absent. The court postpones the matter to another day in order to have him summoned.

"Lord X says to me: 'Here are more of the disastrous effects produced by the same laws. The most direct consequence of the Poor Laws is to make the support of abandoned babies, who are the neediest of all indigents, a public expense. From this is born the desire to release the villages from supporting illegitimate children whose parents would be capable of taking care of them. From this also comes the inquiry into paternity brought about by the village and whose proof is left to the woman. For what other type of proof can one pride oneself on obtaining in

such a situation? In requiring the villages to care for illegitimate children and in allowing the villages to investigate paternity in order to lighten this overwhelming burden, we have facilitated as much as we could the misconduct of lower-class women. Illegitimate pregnancies must almost always improve these women's material situation. If the father of the child is rich, the woman can hand over to him the responsibility of raising the fruit of their joint error; if he is poor, these women can confer this responsibility upon society. The assistance that is given to them from one or the other almost always surpasses the newborn's expenses. Thus, they enrich themselves by their very vices, and it often happens that the daughter who has many times been a mother makes a more advantageous marriage than the young virgin who has only her virtues to offer. The first finds a kind of dowry in her infamy."

I repeat that I wanted to change nothing in this passage from my journal. I have reproduced it in the same words, because it seemed to have simply and truthfully given the impressions that I wanted to share with the reader.

Since my journey to England, the poor laws have been modified. Many Englishmen flatter themselves that these changes will have a great influence on the indigents' future, on their morality, and on their number. I would like to share these hopes, but I would not know how. In this new law, today's Englishmen have again consecrated the principle acknowledged 250 years ago by Elizabeth. Like this princess, they have imposed upon society the obligation to feed the poor. This is enough. All of the abuses I have tried to describe are contained in the first principle like the largest oak tree, whose acorn can be held in the hand of a child. It needs only time to develop and to grow. To wish to establish a law which regularly, permanently, and uniformly gives assistance to indigents, without their number increasing, their laziness growing with their needs, their idleness with their vices, is to plant the acorn and to be stunned, first, when a stem appears,

then leaves, later flowers, and finally fruits, which, spreading widely, will one day give forth a green forest from the depths of the earth.

I am certainly far from wanting to put on trial beneficence, which is simultaneously the most beautiful and most sacred of virtues. But I think that there is no principle so good that its consequences are only good. I believe that beneficence must be a manly and reasoned virtue, not a feeble and thoughtless inclination. I believe that it is necessary not to do the good that pleases most of those who give, but that which is truly useful for the recipient; not that which most completely relieves the miseries of some, but that which serves the well-being of the greatest number. I would know how to measure beneficence only in this manner; taken in another sense, it is still a sublime instinct, but in my view, it does not deserve the name of virtue.

I acknowledge that individual charity almost always produces useful effects. It addresses the largest miseries; it walks quietly behind misfortune and, unannounced and silently, repairs the ills that misfortune has caused. It shows up everywhere there are unfortunates to assist; it grows with sufferings. One cannot, however, count on it without recklessness, because a thousand accidents can slow or stop its workings. One does not know where it can be found, and it is not aroused by the cry of all sufferings.

I admit that by regulating aid, associations of charitable people could give greater activity and power to individual beneficence.²¹ I recognize not only the utility, but also the necessity, of a public charity applied to inevitable evils such as infant frailty, the failings of old age, illness, insanity. I also admit its momentary usefulness in times of public emergency which from time to time emanate from the hands of God, to tell nations of his anger. State alms are then as instantaneous, as unforeseen, and as fleeting as the evil itself.

I even understand public charity opening schools for the children of the poor and freely supplying intelligence with the means to achieve, through work, the goods of the body.

But I am deeply convinced that any regularized, permanent, administrative system whose goal is to provide for the needs of the poor will give birth to more miseries than it is able to heal, will deprave the population it wants to aid and console, will over time reduce the rich to being but the tenant-farmers of the poor, will dry up the springs of savings, will halt the accumulation of capital, will reduce the growth of commerce, will dull human activity and industry, and will end by bringing a violent revolution in the state when the number of those who receive alms becomes as large as the number of those giving them and when the indigent, not able to draw from the impoverished rich what is necessary for their needs, find it easier to strip them suddenly of their goods than to demand assistance from them.

Let us briefly summarize everything that has preceded:

The progressive march of modern civilization gradually increases, and in a proportion that is more or less rapid, the number of those who are brought to appeal to charity.

What remedy can be brought to such evils?

Legal alms comes to mind first—legal alms in all of its forms: now free, now disguised under the form of a wage, now accidental and fleeting in certain times, now regular and permanent in others. But a deep examination quickly demonstrates that this remedy, which seems both so natural and so efficacious, is a dangerous undertaking. In whatever manner it is used, it brings but a false and momentary relief to individual sorrows, and it aggravates society's wounds.

Thus, we are left with individual charity. It knows how to produce only useful effects. Its very weakness protects it from its dangers. It relieves many miseries and gives birth to none. But faced with the progressive development of industrial classes and all of the evils that civilization mixes with the inestimable goods it produces, individual charity appears quite weak. Though sufficient in the Middle Ages, when religious fervor gave it immense energy and when its task was therefore less difficult to complete, what will it become today, when the burden it must bear is heavy

and when its powers are weakened? Individual charity is a powerful agent that society must not scorn, but to which it would be imprudent to entrust itself: it is one means, but it cannot be the sole one.

What, then, is left to be done? Where should we look? How can we reduce the evils that we have the ability to see but not to heal?

Until now, I have examined the monetary solution to poverty. But is there nothing other than this type of solution? After we have dreamt of relieving the evils, would it not be useful to look to prevent them? Can we not prevent the rapid movement of the population, so that men do not leave the land and go over to industry except to the extent that industry can easily respond to their needs? Can the total national wealth continue to grow without the part that produces this wealth having to curse the prosperity they have generated? Is it impossible to establish a more permanent and regular connection between the production and the consumption of manufactured goods? Can we not foster among the working classes the accumulation of savings, which would, in times of industrial disaster, allow them to await better fortunes without dying?

The horizon opens before me here. My subject grows larger. I see a path opening, but at this moment, I cannot follow it. The present memoir, too short for that which I had to treat, already exceeds the limits that I believed necessary to set for myself. The aid measures with which one can hope to be able to combat pauperism in a preventive manner will be the focus of a second report with which I intend to pay tribute to the Academic Society of Cherbourg next year.

Memoir on Pauperism (1835)

1. Tocqueville delivered this address to the Royal Academic Society of Cherbourg in 1835, and it was published in the *Mémoires de la société académique de Cherbourg* (1835), 293–344.
2. The French term is *commune* (here in the plural, *communes*), traditionally translated in *Democracy in America* as “township.” For

Tocqueville, this is the basic unit of governance and an essential element within a free democracy. In the township, individuals learn the art of political and voluntary association, as well as how to exercise self-interest well understood. All of these are essential elements for a free democratic society.

3. Alban de Villeneuve-Bargemont (1784–1850) was a French political figure and economist whose thoughts about the causes of and solutions to modern poverty influenced Tocqueville. The figure cited would have been drawn from Villeneuve-Bargemont's *Économie politique chrétienne, ou recherches sur la nature et les causes du paupérisme en France et en Europe et sur les moyens de le soulager et de le prévenir* (1834).

4. Albiano Balbi (1782–1848) was a well-known Italian geographer. His *Essai statistique sur le royaume de Portugal et d'Algarve* (1822) is the most likely source of the statistic.

5. The department of the Nord is North, in the Pas-de-Calais region; the Creuse is in South-Central France, in the former region of Limousin (now Nouvelle-Aquitaine); the Manche is to the North, in Lower Normandie.

6. The French is *sauvage*, which can mean “savage,” but also “wild” or “natural.”

7. The French is *esprit*, which can mean both “mind” and “spirit.”

8. Mores (*moeurs*) are another central Tocquevillian concept that is difficult to translate into English. Often translated as “manners” or “morals,” and sometimes shorthanded as “habits of the heart,” the term *mores* encompasses the entire set of beliefs, ideas, opinions, manners, morals, and habits of a people. In *Democracy in America*, Tocqueville asserts that mores are by far the most important factor in preserving liberty and that when mores and laws conflict, it is law that will give way. Significantly, Tocqueville also believes that women are the guardians of mores.

9. Representing the largest portion of the nation, the *tiers état* was, together with the nobility and the clergy, one of the three orders into which the prerevolutionary French nation was divided within the Estates-General.

10. The secretary of the Royal Academic Society of Cherbourg was Joseph Laurent Couppey, a civil tribunal judge who published various studies about Normandy in the Middle Ages.

11. The French is *de son industrie* and could also connote involvement in trade or manufacturing.

12. The French is *misérable*; *la misère* is poverty.

13. The ellipsis points are Tocqueville's.

14. *Sauvage*, or uncivilized.

15. The office of overseer of the poor existed from 1597 until 1834.

Each parish was required to have two overseers, who were elected annually and who were responsible for administering poor relief and for determining who was—or was not—a fitting recipient of relief.

16. While I have chosen “village” as the appropriate translation for *commune* in discussions pertaining to England, I have followed most translators in using “township” for *commune* in Tocqueville’s discussions of France and the United States.

17. The French is *inquiétude*, which is one of the central characteristics of the democratic soul Tocqueville describes in the 1840 volume of *Democracy in America*.

18. The French is *un pauvre*, which I have here translated as “pauper,” for Tocqueville’s point is that this apparently prosperous individual is a claimant of legal charity.

19. Tocqueville uses *l’administrateur des pauvres*. Elsewhere I have translated *administrateur* as “administrator,” but here I have translated Tocqueville’s phrase as “overseer of the poor,” since overseers’ judgments were appealed to justices of the peace, as in this case.

20. The French is *égoïste*. In *Democracy in America*, Tocqueville contrasts egoism with individualism. He characterizes the former as the passionate and exaggerated type of self-love that has always existed, and he contrasts it with individualism, which is a rational sentiment that originates in democratic times and that leads the individual to turn away from public life.

21. Its vibrant associative life was one of the things that most struck Tocqueville about the United States. Within a democracy, associations took the place of the powerful individuals found in aristocracies. The science of association, he thought, was “the mother science” and essential to the preservation of democratic liberty. Associative life’s positive psychological effects included tempering isolated individualism and augmenting the individual’s sense of his/her own strength; both of these, thought Tocqueville, were important safeguards against soft despotism.